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Book Reviews

A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes. By GEORGE AARON BARTON. [International Critical Commentary.] New York: Scribner, 1908. Pp. xiv+212. $2.25.

To the average minister the Book of Ecclesiastes is little more than a bundle of inconsistencies, from which he occasionally extracts a striking text. The significance of the book as a whole is to him an enigma. He sometimes questions its right to a place in the Bible. This new commentary will be found invaluable by all such persons. The appeal of the volume, however, is primarily to the careful student for whom the International Series of Commentaries is intended; to such a seeker it will yield rich returns.

The history of the interpretation of Ecclesiastes is extremely interesting. For centuries attributed to Solomon and treated as a unit, scholarly opinion has in recent years gone to the opposite extreme. Critics like Siegfried, Bickell, and Haupt have left scarcely one stone standing upon another in the structure of the book. It has become the fashion to consider it the work of many men of many minds. But Professor Barton strives to find the golden mean by being not overmuch analytical or hypercritical. Following the lead of McNeile's *Introduction to Ecclesiastes*, he resolves the book into three strands which may be clearly traced in the text. The first writer was Qoheleth, whose name the book carries. To him belong those portions of the text reflecting a somewhat pessimistic and materialistic outlook upon life, yet withal religious. The second contributor was a lyrical sage who took advantage of the presence of some proverbial wisdom in the text of Qoheleth to add other maxims less directly connected with the teachings of Qoheleth. Finally, to give this book, carrying the weight of Solomon's great name as author, the necessary religious tone, a Jewish saint of Pharisaic type added those passages which blunt the edge of Qoheleth's sharp sayings and bring the book more nearly into line with orthodox religion. This account of the origin seems to meet all the demands of a good working hypothesis and to yield a satistactory meaning for the book.

Sanity of judgment, rather than novelty of view, is characteristic of this volume. This appears in the decision to allow Qoheleth the liberty of writing in poetry or prose as the nature of his theme or his mood at the

time of writing may dictate. It appears in Professor Barton's reluctance to adopt any one of the current views as to the nature of Hebrew meter. It is conspicuous also in his attitude toward the much-discussed question of Greek influence upon the thought of Ecclesiastes. He refuses to acknowledge any dependence of Qoheleth upon either Epicurean or Stoic thought, and agrees with McNeile in considering the Hebrew spirit capable of producing the parallels to these philosophies under the conditions of its own environment. An interesting parallel is adduced from the Gilgamesh epic of Babylonia to show that the Semitic mind had already as early as 2000 B. C. worked out types of thought similar to those current in Greece at a far later date. The commentary proper is well arranged; each section of the text falls under the following scheme: title, general summary, translation, general comments, textual and critical notes. The translation is in fine type and the poetical portions of the text are printed as such. The different sources are indicated by different styles of type. The only defect in the makeup of the volume is the inexcusably bad proofreading. In every other respect the work constitutes a worthy companion volume to those that have preceded it in this splendid series. It is, of course, easily the best commentary in English on Ecclesiastes and is surpassed by none in any language.

JOHN MERLIN POWIS SMITH

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

The Dated Events of the Old Testament. By WILLIS JUDSON BEECHER, D.D. Philadelphia: The Sunday School Times Co., 1907. Pp. 202. $1.50.

The title of this work is suggestive. It seems to be based on materials which are valuable in determining a chronological scheme. These materials in the Old Testament are of four kinds: (1) numerals, (2) time words, (3) the order in which events are mentioned, and (4) the nature of events. There are also data in great abundance from extra-biblical sources which were not available in the times of Ussher and other great biblical chronologists. The most valuable of these sources are the Canon of Ptolemy, the Assyrian Eponym Lists, the Babylonian Lists of dynasties and of kings, the synchronous history of Assyria-Babylonia, and some Egyptian lists of kings, and history containing dated events; also some astronomical data.

Professor Beecher discusses, in five introductory chapters, the material, the methods, the limits and the value of Bible chronology. The body of the work is devoted to chronological parallels of the events in Israel and the most important contemporaneous peoples from Abraham's appearance in